

**Women in Fisheries Forum (WIFF) in Belize:
Promoting Gender Equality and Equity in Fisheries**

**Foro de Mujeres en la Pesca (WIFF) en Belice:
Promover la Igualdad de Género y la Equidad en la Pesca**

**Le Forum des Femmes dans les Pêches (WIFF) au Belize:
Promouvoir l'Égalité entre les Sexes et l'Équité dans les Pêcheries**

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ABSTRACT

The first ever Women in Fisheries Forum (WIFF) in Belize, jointly organized by the Belize Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project (MCCAP) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), has been a major step towards understanding the role of women in fisheries there. Geared towards promoting gender equality and equity in the allocation of resources, rights, status and responsibilities between women and men, the WIFF attracted 52 female participants representing all aspects of the fisheries value chain – fisheries management, gear/equipment services, harvesting and marketing, and processing and distribution – with the main objective of developing a Gender Action Plan to mainstream gender in the daily activities of government departments, NGOs and projects in Belize. The results of two studies, the MCCAP Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) survey and the Gender in Fisheries Team (GIFT) scoping survey of perspectives on Gender Equality in Caribbean Fisheries, informed group discussions on fisherfolk organizations, working conditions, fisheries management, development decision-making, formal credit for fisheries, and capacity development. We examine the discussions that highlighted women's issues, constraints and challenges in the fisheries sector, and set out recommendations for addressing these matters in a Gender Action Plan. Further discussion of the draft plan is needed prior to finalization. While it was the first WIFF to be convened, it will not be the last; MCCAP is committed to hosting another forum in 2018. Similar forums such as this should be held in other countries to better understand gender in small-scale fisheries.

KEYWORDS: Women in Fisheries Forum, Belize, gender equality and equity, Gender in Fisheries Team, small-scale fisheries

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the voluntary guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries (SSF) in the context of food security and poverty eradication (FAO 2015) is seen as a great stride for small-scale fisheries in the Caribbean. Regional organizations/networks such as the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations (CNFO) and the Gender in Fisheries Team (GIFT) are actively encouraging national fisherfolk organizations to incorporate the SSF in national and regional policies. Furthermore, the SSF recognizes gender equality and equity as fundamental to small-scale fisheries development. Yet, gender mainstreaming is only now beginning to talk about in national policies. GIFT main purpose is to facilitate and support implementation of the SSF Guidelines in the Caribbean, focusing on sub-section 8 on gender equality. Recently, GIFT drafted a gender scoping preliminary report to provide to start the gathering of information and discussion on gender in the Caribbean to guide the introduction of gender mainstreaming using the SSF Guidelines as the context (GIFT 2017). As part of their efforts, GIFT and CNFO partnered to undertake a small survey to examine the perspectives on gender equality amongst fisherfolks in the Caribbean using the provisions of the SSF Guidelines, by using the gender equality in Caribbean fisheries survey (Nicholls et. al. *In press*). The survey was repeated in Belize. The results are presented in this poster.

METHOD

The survey instrument was a ten-question, one-page form designed to be completed electronically, or printed, filled in and scanned, or interviews (telephone, face-to-face). Responses choices for all versions were Likert scale rating with an optional open-ended question at the end. The instrument measured the degree of agreement to disagreement with statements drawn from sub-sections of the gender chapter 8 of the SSF Guidelines and focused on gender equality in society generally and the fisheries sector specifically (GIFT 2017). The target population of respondents consisted of only women in the fisheries value chain, whom were selected at their convenience. Data from completed instruments were entered in IBM SPSS Statistics 21 for analysis to produce descriptive statistics.

The results of the perception of gender in fisheries were validated at the first ever Women in Fisheries Forum (WIFF) in Belize, jointly organized by the Belize Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project (MCCAP), Fisheries Department, and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). The WIFF was held at the Best Western Belize Biltmore Plaza Hotel, Belize City on June 13, 2017. The aim was to promote the achievement of gender equality and equity in the allocation of resources, rights, status and responsibilities between women and men. The WIFF attracted 52 female participants representing all aspects of the fisheries value chain – fisheries management, gear/equipment services, harvesting and marketing, and processing and distribution. Participants were divided into five groups of ten women, and discussed 3 topics per group. The groups were asked to highlight women's issues, constraints, and challenges in the fisheries sector, and set

out recommendations for addressing these matters in a Gender Action Plan.

RESULTS

Seventy-eight women involved in the fisheries value chain responded to the survey; 18% were Management/Administration, 37% community members, 15% Processors working in fish processing plants, 22% fishers, and 8% scalers/vendors with individual stalls at fish markets.

Women perception of gender in society and the fisheries are presented in Table 1.

Most female respondents agreed (76%) that more should be done now to ensure that women and men in the fishing industry in Belize have equal rights and opportunities. Based on the low agreement scores in the survey, the results of the survey were validated at a Women in Fisheries Forum. Action plan recommendations resulted from the group discussions and are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Women perception of gender in society and the fisheries

Statement	Main response (% agree/disagree)
Perception of gender in society	
Question 1 – Men and women are currently treated equally in society	57% Disagree
Question 2 – Women and men currently have equal opportunities in society e.g. in education, professionals, pay, politics, etc.	53% Agree
Question 9 – The equality of women and men is backed by legislation	59% Agree
Question 10 – There is a national policy on gender that aims at equality	55% Agree
Perception of gender in fisheries	
Question 3 – Fisheries management and development currently take the needs of both men and women equally into account	53% Agree
Question 4 – There is no discrimination against women in fisheries	44% Agree
Question 5 – There is equal participation of men and women in the decision-making processes for fisheries plans, policies	45% Agree
Question 6 – Women are encouraged equally with men to participate actively in the existing fisher folk organizations you know	57% Agree
Question 7 – Men and woman have equal access to fisheries technical services, training and others for capacity development	67% Agree
Question 8 – Women and men have equal access to formal credit for fisheries such as bank or credit union loans, or grants	46% Agree

Table 2. Goal: To provide information that will lead to mainstreaming gender in the fishing industry

Theme	Actions	Activities
Communication	Mainstream gender in policies, programme, and documentation	Compile documents that deals with gender to inform stakeholders of international, regional, and national gender policies/mainstreaming etc. Develop information products
	Support compliance with the international/ national/ regional policies on gender in fisheries	Sensitize NGO's and Government Sensitize communities on gender policies, social security benefits, rights of workers, access to financial services, etc.
	Promote partnerships, linkages, and sharing of knowledge on gender mainstreaming	Identify and partner with GOB, NGOs and private sector for training, mentoring, capacity building Facilitate learning forum, knowledge exchange
	Promote social protection for women (direct and indirect benefits of workers and spouse/children of workers)	Develop communication strategy to target women in awareness campaigns
Research	Support the development of a gender research agenda	Disaggregate fisheries data by sex Participate in interdisciplinary gender research Conduct gender analysis at the fishing community level
	Improve gender research and analysis	Conduct research on women in fisheries (roles and responsibilities) Identify the needs of men and women in disaster risk management and climate change
Training	Support capacity building, training, and education	Target women in education and training events Provide the necessary social/financial support to women
	Develop appropriate training and capacity strengthening programmes	Facilitate training to build awareness and enhance skills/power so that community members can make informed decisions for self/ household/community
Monitoring & Evaluation	Develop gender responsive monitoring and evaluation system	Build the capacity of Fisheries Officers and NGO's on gender responsive M&E to track gender equality and equity

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that while most respondents agree with the SSF Guidelines statements, there is a lot more that could be done to improve gender equality and equity in the fisheries sector. The first attempt at a Gender Action Plan for the fisheries sector needs further discussion prior to finalization. Government, NGOs, and the private sector needs to operationalize the Action Plan and work together to better understand gender in small-scale fisheries in Belize. The Belize Fisheries Department, Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project and Wildlife Conservation Society are committed to coordinating this effort in Belize, in collaboration with efforts of GIFT and CNFO.

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LITERATURE CITED

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